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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS
lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO
cover colors by DAN JACKSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin* vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge.

RIN
Last heir of the Muneichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Itto-*ryū*, seeks Anotsu's death.

ANOTSU
The leader of the Itto-*ryū* sword school, targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*.

ABAYAMA
Anotsu's second-in-command, survived a recent ambush.

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful, manipulative Mugai-*ryū* leader and *bangashira*, serving the Shogun.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Habaki Kagimura orchestrates a surprise attack at a lavish banquet that decimates a batch of new Itto-*ryū* recruits (as seen in *Blade of the Immortal* #89). With ten core followers still alive, Anotsu rallies his surviving warriors to dish out swift vengeance.

designer DEBRA BAILEY editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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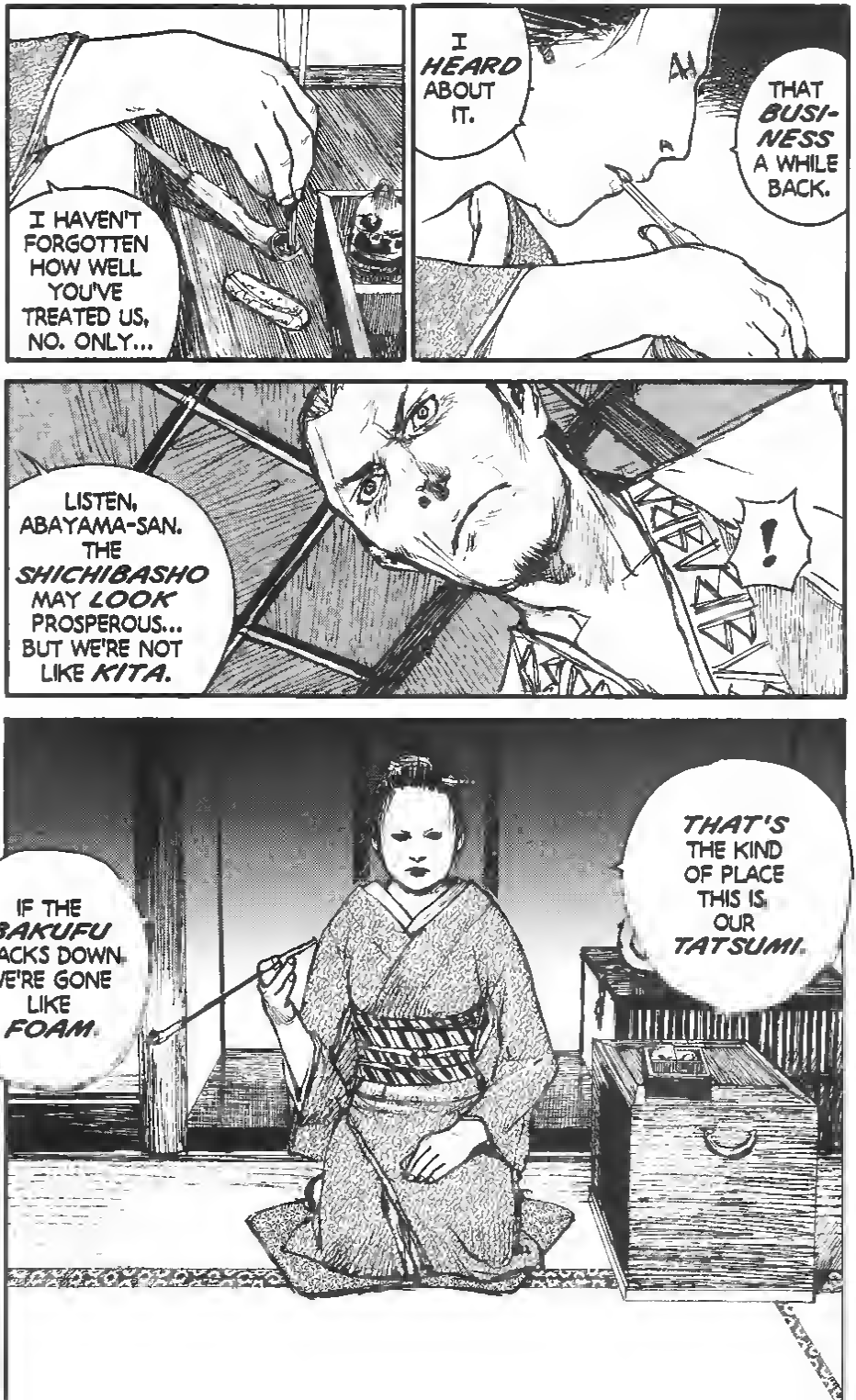
無限の住人

PITY

SO YOU SAY YOU'VE *HAD IT* WITH THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*... IS *THAT* WHAT YOU MEAN?
SIGN: YUKIMACHI

WELL, O-KANE?!


I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HOW WELL YOU'VE TREATED US, NO. ONLY...
I *HEARD* ABOUT IT.
THAT *BUSI-NESS* A WHILE BACK.
LISTEN, ABAYAMA-SAN. THE *SHICHIBASHO* MAY *LOOK* PROSPEROUS... BUT WE'RE NOT LIKE *KITA*.
!
IF THE *BAKUFU* CRACKS DOWN, WE'RE GONE LIKE *FOAM*.
THAT'S THE KIND OF PLACE THIS IS. OUR *TATSUMI*.

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF FOLK WHO WANT TO FIGHT THE BAKUFU.
THIS ISN'T JUST YUKIMACHI'S O-KANE PLAYING COY.
IT'S THE CONSENSUS OF ALL THE BIG HOUSES HERE IN NAKA-MACHI.
AND ANOTHER THING.
.....
.....
.....
UNDER-STOOD.

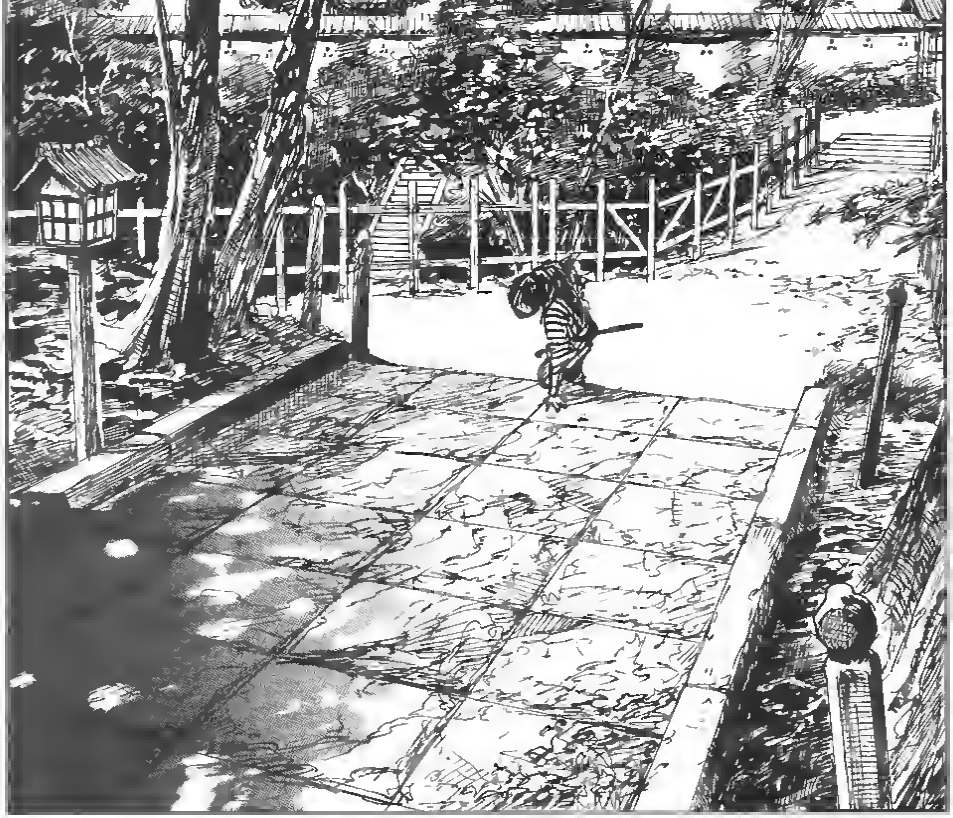
YOU STAY DAMN CLEAR, EVEN AS CUSTOM-ERS.
GOD KNOWS WHO ELSE'LL GET HERSELF KILLED...
.....
.....
.....

I WANTED TO SEE HOW O-SEI'S DOING, BUT I CAN'T FIND HER.
YOU KNOW WHERE SHE WENT, HAYA?
O-SEI-SAN DOESN'T... WORK HERE ANYMORE...
EH?! SOMEONE BOUGHT HER FREEDOM?!
SHE'S DEAD.
BUT HE GOT THE MEASLES LAST WINTER, SEE?
STARVE, OR JOIN OUR LITTLE WORLD.
I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT O-SEI-SAN. HER FOLKS DIED WHEN SHE WAS A KID, SO SHE LIVED WITH HER OLDER BROTHER.
HE WAS A STREET MERCHANT.

AND THEN? HER BODY HACKED UP LIKE THAT?
WHORE. NO-THING. ALL SHE COULD DO...
...WAS HANG HER-SELF WITH HIM.

HOW MAY I HELP YA, SIR?
LET'S SEE. TWO SHŌ OF SALT...
THEN ONE OF...

AH...?!
WHY...
...THE FUCK IS HE ALIVE?!
COME BACK HERE!!



:haaff!:
:haaff!:
:uhh!:
DON'T NEED TO *RUN*, EH?
RIGHT, MAKOTO?

I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE WORKING FOR SOMEONE.
BUT HELL, BOY. THE BAKUFU...? GUESS I MIS-JUDGED YOU. LET YOU SWIM TOO LONG.

AM I WRONG?

.....
.....

HEY...
...NO POINT KILLING YOU NOW.
RISKING CERTAIN DEATH LIKE THAT, SO YOUNG? GUESS YOU HAD REASONS.
THAT LITTLE DRAMA AT THE BANQUET WAS HABAKI KAGIMURA'S DOING. YOU WEREN'T EVEN A WALK-ON...
...BUT STILL...
...IT'S POLITE TO APOLOGIZE BEFORE YOU RUN. EH?!

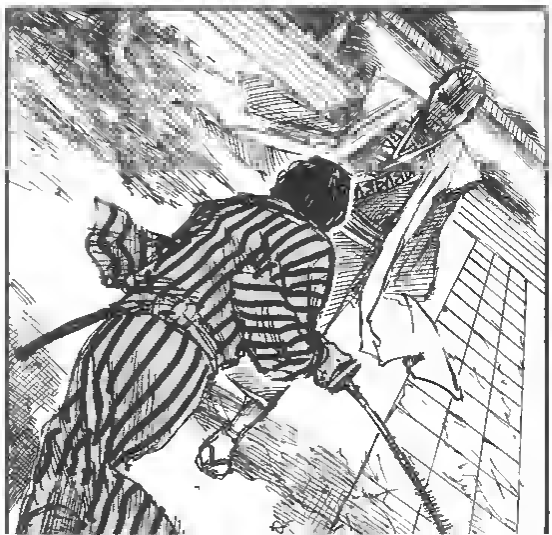
I WASN'T TRYING... TO *RUN*.
I CAME UP HERE 'CUZ I COULDN'T *KILL YOU*...
...BACK THERE
!
EVEN ONE OF YOU *ITTŌ-RYŪ* SHITS...
...KILLING AN UNARMED MAN WOULD JUST...
...*DISTURB* ANY ONLOOKERS.

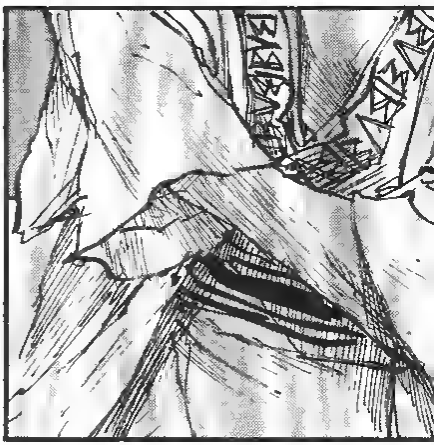
AND *REASONS*?! SCREW THAT! THEY BOUGHT ME OUT OF *YOSHICHŌ*...
...AND THE NEXT THING I KNOW, I'M DOING *THIS*.
I'M FORCED TO FIGHT YOU NOW.
WHETHER YOU KILL ME OR NOT...
...UP HERE, NO ONE'LL SEE US.
UNARMED, *ONE-ARMED*, WHO CARES?

BWAH HAH HAH!
GEHH HEH. HEH...
?!
CHILD.
YOU THOUGHT THE OLD COOT'D BE UN-ARMED?

CARELESS, CARE-LESS, MAKOTO.
WE EAT OUTTA THE SAME POT FOR THREE MONTHS...
...AND YOU STILL CAN'T EVEN TELL...
...WHEN YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE IN HELL?
MAKOTO, YOU NEVER BELONGED IN OUR WORLD.

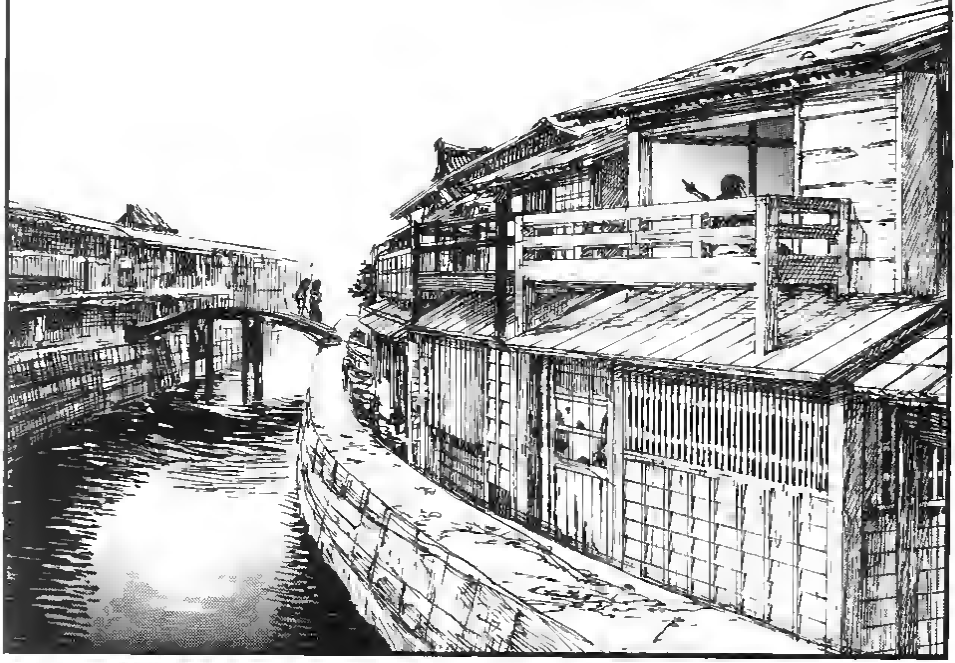
SHUT UP!

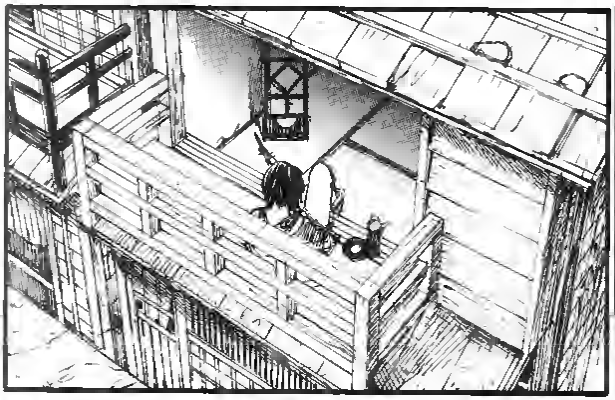


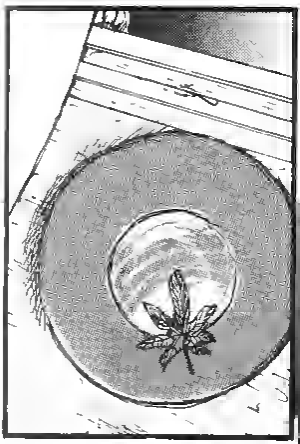


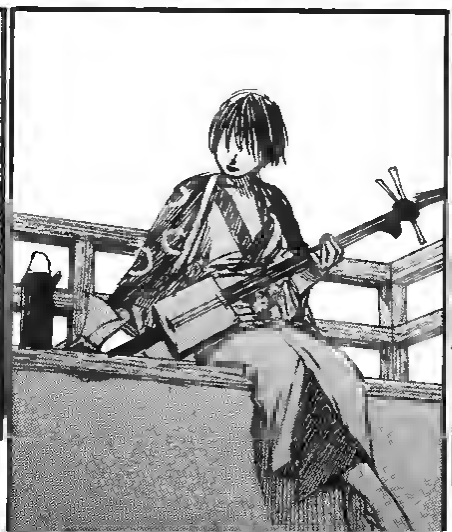
ああ！
HSSS
FEAR
PITIFUL...

HABAKI KAGIMURA!
MUST YOU MAKE THIS OLD MAN KILL A MERE CHILD LIKE HIM?









O, Sumida river
The parting boat
Stirs your autumn leaves

To the long-waiting songstress
I hear you whisper
He shall not come this way again

In Yanagi-bashi,
The shamisen cry of life's deep sorrows
Shall be our nightingale song of spring

And so, let us go
Stepping on one corpse
Stepping on two

Stumble once upon the fallen
And lonely sparrows shall scatter
From their old bamboo

NEXT MONTH:
Forsaken

With "Forsaken," another one-shot episode, manga master Hiroaki Samura gives us a peek into *Blade of the Immortal*'s darkest corner. Get ready to be seriously disturbed! Also in this issue, Rin is reunited with an old ally, two compelling, new Itto-ryu warriors are introduced—and Manji and Habaki finally sit down for a little talk. This Eagle and Eisner Award-winning epic reaches another major turning point!

GLOSSARY

bakufu: The central government and bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa Shogunate. Originally established in Edo by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Itto-ryu: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.

Kita: Literally, "north." Nickname for Yoshiwara, the largest and most famous of Edo's pleasure districts, in the north of the city.

Mugai-ryū: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets.

Nakamachi: One of the *Shichibasho*.

ryū: A sword school.

Shichibasho: Literally, "The Seven Spots." The red-light districts in Fukagawa, east of the Sumida River.

shō: Unit of measurement, approximately 1.80391 liters.

Tatsumi: The southeast part of Edo overlapping the modern Fukagawa district, home to the *Shichibasho*.

Yoshichō: Red-light district for male prostitutes.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare" from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

Manji and Rin!
Pinup by Adrian Sibar, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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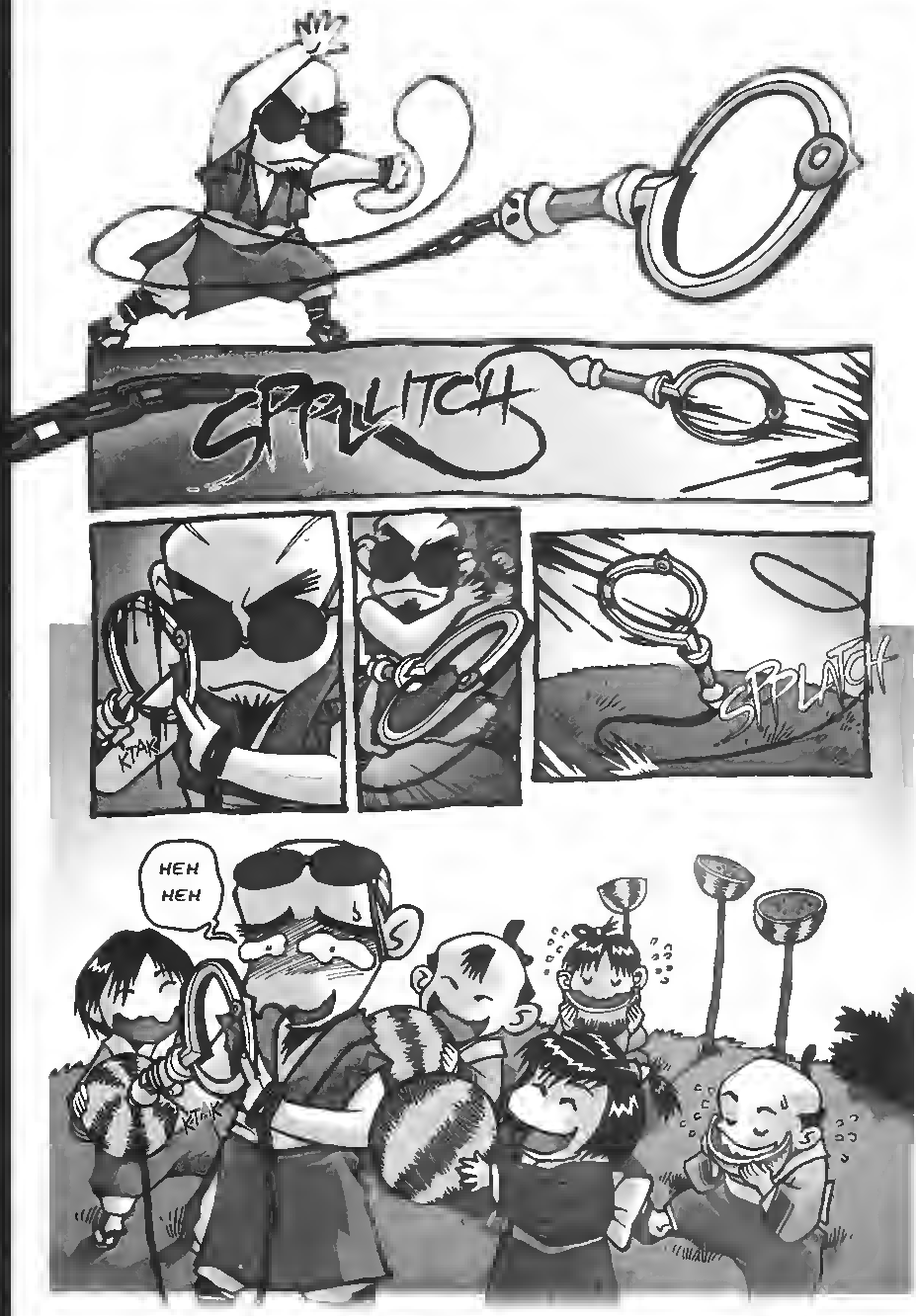
Rumble to Kaga

by Ihomar Soriano, Pasay City, Philippines. Gag writing by Philip Simon.



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Magatsu and Giichi!
Pinup by Taga-Ilog, Pasig City Philippines

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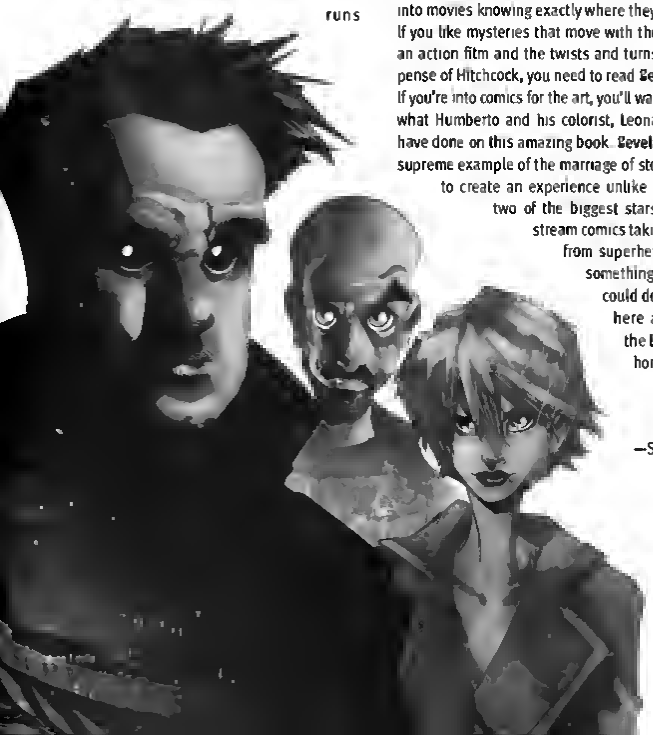
HORSEPOWER

Revelations

Revelations is the kind of comic I've always wanted to see—it'd be the kind of novel I eat up, the kind of film I wish someone would make. Maybe my boss can see to that, now that he's made the great decision, after my pleading, to publish this comic. Paul Jenkins and Humberto Ramos earned their reputations working on books like Impulse; Wolverine, Origin; The Darkness; Crimson; and together on Spectacular Spider-Man, where they were paid well to perfect their craft, experiment with style and storytelling, and establish massive fan bases in this country and others. Now they're doing their most unique, most exciting work for us, and they have total control.

Dark Horse's biggest marketing push of the year is gearing up behind the most shocking murder mystery of the year. In the first few pages of Revelations, we see a bizarre death inside the Vatican. A man falls from a great height, dashed on a cobblestone plaza. If that weren't a sure enough death sentence, another man runs up with a strange knife and stabs him, only to be shot down by the Vatican police. The six issue series that begins there will surprise and shock—not least of all because the man who died on page three was next in line to succeed the ailing Pope.



Paul, who's got an Englishman's skepticism of the papacy, and Humberto, who's still very true to his Catholic faith, have dug deeply into their backgrounds to create an authentic tale of murder, lies, and betrayal. So what's a murder mystery doing in the Dark Horse horror line, alongside The Goon, Hellboy, and Man With the Screaming Brain? Well, like I said, there are some shocking things down the road.

The guys in marketing are not gonna like that I'm not willing to give away the things I like most about this book, but aren't we all sick of walking into movies knowing exactly where they're going? If you like mysteries that move with the power of an action film and the twists and turns and suspense of Hitchcock, you need to read Revelations. If you're into comics for the art, you'll want to study what Humberto and his colorist, Leonardo Olea, have done on this amazing book. Revelations is a supreme example of the marriage of story and art to create an experience unlike any other, two of the biggest stars of mainstream comics taking a break from superheroes to do something only they could do, and only here as part of the Dark Horse horror line.

—Scott Allie

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AUGUST 2005

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